

Greek Theater

Let's go to the show!

Do Now: What separates the theater from other forms of entertainment? What makes a play a play?

Amphitheater

- Greek plays were performed in huge, open air amphitheaters
- One of the most famous is the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, which could hold 17,000 people! Nearby is the Odeon of Herodes Atticus. Both are on the southeastern slope of the Acropolis
- Amphitheaters had three main sections
 - The Skene – often a building at the back, used for entrances and exits, an acting space, and to hold scenery
 - Orchestra or “Dancing Circle” – main acting area, where the chorus sang to the audience
 - Theatron – seating for the audience



Drama

- Ancient Greeks took their drama very seriously, using it to investigate their world and what it meant to be human
- Tragedy – dealt with love, loss, pride, abuse of power; 3 great tragic playwrights were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides
- Comedy – came after tragedy; usually mocked men in power for their foolishness; 1st master of comedy was Aristophanes, later Menander created the sit-com
- Aristotle argued that tragedy cleansed the heart through pity and terror, purging us of our petty concerns and worries by making us aware that there can be nobility in suffering. He called this experience '**catharsis**'

How were plays performed

- Chorus – described most of the action, represented society and provided advice, opinions, and questions to the actors and audience
- Masks – actors wore giant masks during the play; changed masks to play different characters; added dramatic effect
- Fighting and movement – occurred off stage
- Only male actors – women were in the audience

The Persians (472 BCE)

- Written by Aeschylus and won first prize at the Festival of Dionysus
- Only surviving part of a trilogy
 - Part I: Jason and the Argonauts rescue King Phineas
 - Part III: Glaucus, not sure what it is about
- Shows Xerxes hubris for invading Greece, angers the Gods and is punished


